

due to the military deployment, our income fell to less than 1800.00 a month. This qualified our family for W.I.C., and other forms of public assistance, which we had never needed before, but desperately need now. During his deployment, my husband re-enlisted for another 6 years. He is a very patriotic man and he wanted to do what he felt in his heart was right. We toughed it out and my husband came home in May of 2004. Shortly after his return, we found out we were pregnant with our 4th and last child. He then received his orders for Fort Benning, Georgia. We relocated to Fort Benning and upon his first day of reporting and 6 months TO DO THE DAY of his return from Afghanistan he was told to collect his CIF gear, he would be leaving for Iraq by January and that they needed his combat experience over there. We were devastated, as the birth of our last child was due in February and we were hoping to financially catch up by me going back to work. Due to the fact that my pregnancy was high risk, he was allowed to stay behind until the baby was born. He is now leaving for Iraq this Saturday. My career, in a field that is in dire need of experienced people, will once again be on hold, and we will have to scrape by yet again due to the minimal amount the government pays my husband to leave his family and put his life on the line. I was so disappointed in my government when I heard that many wanted to decrease the deployment pay. We are barely making it as it is and without that pay we would literally be in dire straights. Now there is talk of decreasing the amount of the yearly raise to help the budget. Both of my oldest children go to a military school and it has been a God send. They have deployment groups for them and a counselor to help with the transition, which was very hard during the first deployment. These schools know how special a military child is. Now Donald Rumsfeld wants to shut down our military schools. How much more can you people keep taking from us before you realize that we have nothing left to take? I cannot even repay my government student loan because I can not work because of his continual deployment and the government doesn't pay him enough to keep us above poverty level. My family has sacrificed so much and only keeps getting slapped in the face by our government. My family feels so used. I currently hold a commission as Major in the USAF IRR, which I am resigning, and I have told my husband, we will find him a way out. We just can't afford the price of your freedom anymore. I am sorry but fine speeches and big talk cannot put food on my table and bring my husband home alive. Thank you for this chance to share this with you.

Richard Perez, Sr.—Las Vegas, NV

On February 10th, 2005 at 11:30pm in Al Asad, Iraq, we lost our only son USMC LCpl Richard A. Perez Jr.

His story is on www.richardperezjr.com website.

The heartache will never end. My wife Rosemarie who had been a senior sales agent for State Farm with the states highest sales totals for the past 4 years is devastated and has no more energy to even perform her job anymore because of the loss of our only son.

I, Richard A. Perez Sr., Battle with this problem daily, recently our son had signed with us on a very large home loan which we thought would solve all problems as we have rented for 20+ years and never owned a home.

We bought it with the pretense that Rich would help us with the home loan and to build upon his career and life with his own family as he was generating money in his management position at Jack in the Box restaurant. The house has not been built as of yet, but the looming cost of a home here in

Las Vegas is skyrocketing and a big payment is due soon. We cannot afford to do this as our daughter is a student at UNLV another a student in High School aspiring model and actress and a third only 10 years old a gymnast in Henderson . . . all girls who lost their brother.

I personally have lost my job and find myself on unemployment getting 329.00 per week because I grieved too long and could not perform my job at the level expected.

Costs run high, but our family has been ruined by a war my son never intended on entering as he was a reservist and had goals and dreams of his own. We still have not even gotten our sons final report, we don't even know the details of what happened? 8-9 weeks ago . . . He was proud to be a Marine and we are proud of him, the little money the Government gave us has paid his college loans at UCLA and we are faced with the hardship of our lives being ruined, because of Iraq.

My whole family has suffered during the past 2-3 months since the accident but really the past 7-9 months we've been stressed and it has affected all that we do daily.

What a disaster, what a shame that my own land of liberty, land of the free has placed us in bondage for years to come and has all of us reeling as where do we go from here?

I am a 7th generation American. My family tree is American Indian, Spanish and Mexican from Los Angeles, CA. I grew up thinking my country was great, my forefathers defended my stance so we can live today. My very uncle Fred Perez sold airplanes to Iraq and Iran as he worked for Boeing in the 60-70s. My cousin lost a leg in the USMC in Vietnam. My Uncle lost an arm in Korea and my wife's uncle died on the shores of France during WWII. What happened to the American Dream? Why, when my family and son defended liberty, do we now suffer? People in NYC buildings were provided 2 million dollars each so they could adjust to their loss. Yes, they needed it, but we do too.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I will offer an amendment to H.R. 1268 which would require the Department of Defense to submit a report to Congress by July 15, 2005, on the Government's processes and policies for disposal of property at military installations proposed to be closed or realigned as part of the 2005 round of base closure and realignment, and the assistance available to affected local communities for reuse and redevelopment decisions.

This report will be of tremendous assistance to States and local communities affected by BRAC, and faced with difficult decisions about the redevelopment and economic revitalization of their areas. The report required by this amendment is similar to Community Guides to base reuse, which were published by the Department of Defense in all four previous BRAC rounds during the Commission's deliberations. These guides served a vital purpose for affected communities by explaining existing Federal law pertaining to property disposal and by endorsing a proactive and cooperative relationship between military departments and local communities, without appearing to be directive in nature. I ask support for this amendment.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a

period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

ARMY 1ST LIEUTENANT CHARLES WILKINS, III

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, inscribed on an exterior wall of the Chapel at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial in France, are the following words:

These endured all and gave all that justice among nations might prevail and that mankind might enjoy freedom and inherit peace.

Many years after the bloody battle on Normandy's shores and many miles from those sandy beaches and jagged cliffs, Army 1LT Charles Wilkins, III, of Columbus, OH, like the thousands of American servicemen who perished before him over 60 years ago, gave his life so that others, too, might enjoy freedom and inherit peace.

On August 20, 2004, 1st Lieutenant Wilkins was killed near Samarra, Iraq, when a roadside explosive detonated near his Humvee. He was 38-years-old.

Today, I would like to pay tribute to this fellow Ohioan and to take a few moments to remember him here in the Senate Chamber. You see, Charles—or Chuck, as he was known to his family and friends—was a deeply devoted, unselfish man. He lived his life with a sense of duty—always dutiful to his country, to his family, to his friends, and to his job. Chuck defined the term “citizen soldier,” balancing his service in the Ohio National Guard with his obligations to his family and his career.

After attending both Bishop Hartley High School and St. Charles Preparatory School, Chuck graduated in 1985, and enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. After his discharge, he enrolled at The Ohio State University to study economics. While in college, Chuck joined the Ohio National Guard because, according to his sister Lorin, “He wanted to be an officer.” After earning his college degree, Chuck took a job as a transportation planner with the Federal Highway Administration, became a volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, and began attending Capital Law School—all while continuing his service in the National Guard.

At any time, Chuck could have quit being a soldier and settled into a quiet life as a civilian. But, that wasn't the type of person he was. Rather, Chuck was the type of person who always gave 100 percent of himself. In addition to his full time job, his military responsibilities, and his law classes, Chuck served as a peer-advisor at Capital for first-year law students.

As someone who also attended law school, myself, I know how difficult and time consuming study can be—and Chuck Wilkins was doing it with a host of additional fulltime commitments! One of his advisees remembered how helpful Chuck was:

Without Chuck, I doubt I would have made it through that very difficult first year [of law school]. He was always positive and upbeat, and he was constantly encouraging [us] to never give up. We could always count on Chuck to lift us up when we were down. It was important to him to make our first year journey a little bit better by sharing things that weren't available to him during his first year. I'm glad he took the time to make our first year law school world a better place.

Chuck Wilkins always made time for others. As one of his co-workers said, "He was always looking out for somebody else, never for himself." It was this sense of selflessness led Chuck to Iraq.

Chuck was a member of the 216th Engineering Battalion, based in Chillicothe, OH. When his original unit was passed over for deployment to Iraq, Chuck sought a transfer to a unit that was scheduled to deploy in February of 2004. The new unit needed officers, and the Iraqi people needed bridges and roads. Once again, Chuck gave of himself so that others would not go without. It was hard for Chuck to leave his career and his law school studies, but as his sister, Lorin, said, "He was Army, through and through. He wanted to help rebuild Iraq so people could have the same freedoms we do."

As I said earlier, Chuck Wilkins wanted the Iraqi people to "enjoy freedom and inherit peace."

Though his sense of duty compelled him to go, it still was hard for Chuck to leave his family—the family he loved so very much. Like any mother, Natalie Wilkins did not want her son to leave for war. She begged him not to go and to seek an exemption, but Chuck would just reply, Mom, I can't stay. I have to go with my men." While his deep sense of duty pulled him away from his loved ones here at home, Chuck remained a family man" in every sense of that phrase. His sister, Lorin, says that Chuck was always there for the family. She said that even with his busy schedule, if you called him, he would be there." He took good care of his mom and dad and his sisters, always making sure that his family was provided for—whether he was home in Ohio or thousands of miles away in Iraq.

Charles Wilkins, Jr.—Chuck's father—says that one of his last memories of his son is of him swimming in a pool, playing with his nephew, laughing. That is when Chuck Wilkins was happiest—that is when he was making others happy, making them feel safe and cared for and protected.

We honor the fallen because they have honored us—with their service, with their sacrifice. Charles Wilkins not only gave himself to his country, he gave a little bit of himself to everyone he met.

When Charles passed away, his mother said that the world lost a good man—a man whose life was bound by duty and good deeds. Our world is the lesser without him, but it is also the better for the time he lived on this earth. Charles Wilkins was a good cit-

izen, a good soldier, a devoted family man, and a compassionate human being. Everyone who met him was touched by him in some way. He will be dearly missed.

My wife Fran and I continue to keep his grandmother, Dorothy; his mother, Natalie; his father, Charles; and his sisters Lorin and Davina in our thoughts and our prayers.

I yield the floor.

ALASKA-MONGOLIA TIES

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to and recognize the contributions of an ally to the United States, an ally that has contributed to our efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq and who has worked in close cooperation with my State of Alaska.

While their contributions have not received the widespread recognition given to other countries, the nation of Mongolia has been a steadfast friend of the United States. They have not been deterred by those critics who deride the quality of the nations included in the coalition forces.

Mongolia's contributions mean a bit more to the State of Alaska. In September 2004, we marked the 1-year anniversary of the start of the Alaska-Mongolia National Guard State Partnership.

Through the State Partnership Program, a true friendship has developed between Mongolia and Alaska. Our National Guard has established broad working relationships and increased exchanges with their Mongolian partners. They stand side by side with the Mongolian Armed Forces in Iraq as they participate in the coalition fighting the global war on terror. In fact, the Mongolian Ministry of Defense specifically requested Alaska National Guard support based on Alaska's relationship with their nation.

I would like to quote MG Craig Gambell that, "[a]s long as the Mongolian Armed Forces are willing to send troops in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Alaska National Guard will continue to stand by their side."

Prior to 2000, Mongolia did not have a national policy of deploying forces beyond its borders. Yet, they were the first coalition country to contribute an infantry battalion to Iraq. The Mongolian Armed Forces are currently providing security to a logistics base in southern Iraq, escorting convoys, constructing military barracks, medical facilities, and local schools. They deserve special recognition for preventing a suicide attack that could have killed hundreds.

Alaska's pairing with Mongolia in the National Guard State Partnership Program is fitting, given our similar geographic size, topography, population density, and climate. The program allows Alaska's soldiers to work with Mongolian forces on professional military skills as well as in military-to-civil and civil-to-civil areas. Beyond the teamwork in Iraq, other events

have been coordinated to keep the partnership together for years to come.

Last year, an Alaska National Guard delegation met with Prime Minister Elbegdorj, as well as other senior level government and military leaders in Mongolia. Already plans to send observers both this year and next have been made.

The success that the partnership enjoyed this past year is a direct reflection of the willingness and eagerness on both sides to further our relations. The Alaska National Guard tells me that Mongolia is enthusiastic about their democratic reforms and is aggressively working to meet its goals.

I thank the leaders of Mongolia for their friendship and support, and I look forward to the continued success of this partnership between the Land of the Midnight Sun and the Land of Blue Sky.

CAMBODIAN KHMER NEW YEAR

Mr. REED. Mr. President. I rise today on behalf of my fellow Rhode Islanders to commemorate the 2549th Anniversary of the Buddha, the Khmer New Year.

This 3-day anniversary, which begins today, highlights the rich heritage of Cambodian Americans, while recognizing contemporary Khmerian accomplishments. Specifically, the New Year's festivities celebrate the ancient dance, music, and religious traditions of the Cambodian community. The event also provides older Cambodian Americans with an opportunity to pass their customs down to future generations while simultaneously allowing all Khmerians to share their culture with other Americans.

This celebration traditionally serves as a respite between the Khmerian harvest and the weeks colloquially referred to as the "rainy season." Traditionally, the Anniversary of the Buddha affords Khmerians a chance to give thanks, reflect, and welcome the spirit Tevada Chhnam Thmey. Also, in accordance with tradition, scores of Cambodian-Americans will gather with friends and family to visit local monasteries. While there, the Khmerian people will proffer food to their clergymen, pray for ancestors, give charity to the less-fortunate, forgive the misdeeds of others, and thank elders for their knowledge and care.

The Khmerian ceremonies and activities occurring this week demonstrate that each year brings new opportunities for charity, peace, and happiness. Rhode Islanders witnessed the realization of one such opportunity this year. I was fortunate to work with Miriam Hospital in Providence and Representatives Kennedy and Langevin to obtain visas to reunite Cambodian-Rhode Islander Minea Meas with his family. Three long years after Minea received political asylum in our country, his wife, Chantol Lim, and his children Monita, Sovannra, and Sinvath joyfully relocated from Cambodia to build